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# Illinois Issues

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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# Meet the new publisher of *Illinois Issues*



**Michael E. Morsch**

Following a national search, the University of Illinois at Springfield named Michael E. Morsch publisher of *Illinois Issues*. He also will serve as director of the unit that publishes, among other resources, the *Almanac of Illinois Politics* and *Governing Illinois*.

He assumes his new duties July 8.

Morsch replaces Ed Wojcicki, who left in January after serving nearly 10 years as publisher to become associate chancellor for constituent relations on the UIS campus.

Morsch was drawn by the opportunity to work with the magazine's board in furthering *Illinois Issues*' mission. "It is political journalism in its purest form. We want to encourage people to think about public policy and how it affects their lives. Sometimes, I think, people have a tendency to lean toward apathy. And that can be a byproduct of not being educated about the issues. We should provide readers with the truest information and explain to them why it is important."

Publisher was the next logical step in Morsch's career. A 20-year veteran of the newspaper business, he was most recently editor of *The Times Herald* in the Philadelphia suburb of Norristown, Pennsylvania. Before assuming that position two years ago, Morsch was senior news editor for *The State Journal-Register* in Springfield, where he spent 11 years in successively more responsible editorial positions. He also has been a regional editor at the *LaSalle News-Tribune* in LaSalle, regional managing editor at the *Northwest Herald* in Crystal Lake, and

managing editor at the *Corydon Times-Republican* in Corydon, Iowa. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Iowa, Iowa City.

Morsch's experience on the business side of journalism will serve *Illinois Issues* well. His long-term goals include boosting circulation and finding additional funds to enable the magazine to continue to provide quality reporting and analysis of public policy questions.

Returning to Illinois also was the next logical step for this Pekin native. "Philadelphia has its cheesesteaks," he says. "Springfield has its horseshoes. For my money, the horseshoes win hands down."

Why come back to Illinois? It offers, he says, "a more interesting political landscape than one can imagine. I think the question is 'Why leave in the first place?'"

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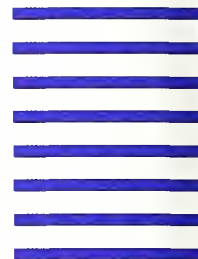
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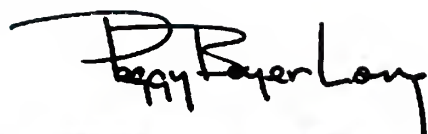
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## Thanks to our editorial team for another year of monthly miracles

by Peggy Boyer Long

**P**ut simply, this magazine couldn't exist without the extraordinary above-and-beyond dedication of a tiny but talented editorial team — and an extended family of writers, artists and photographers.

Thanks aren't enough. Yet the end of the publication year does give me a chance to do this much at least. So here's a few kudos for the folks who devote much of their time and energies to getting a lot of useful information and insight into your hands each month.

I have to start with Aaron Chambers, our reporter at the Statehouse, and my only full-time staffer. No one looks at government and politics in quite the way he does. That's good for our readers because it means he invariably spots the stories behind, and beyond, the daily headlines. Among my favorite articles this past year were his about identity theft and the business of biogenetics. And the newspapers have yet to top his article on local efforts to prepare for potential terrorism attacks. Like everyone else on this team, he also assists with running down facts for other writers' pieces. He has a hand in last-minute copy-editing and proofing. And he lends a good deal of energy and high spirits to our efforts.

Maureen McKinney's title is projects editor. It should be utility player. She helps guide writers through the rigors

of our tougher-than-most content standards. She writes in-depth pieces of her own for the magazine, and news updates for our Web site. Most valuable to me, she challenges us to keep an eye to the ethical standards of our journalistic craft.

Beverley Scobell juggles way too many responsibilities, too. She sets the magazine's standards for grammar and style, and sees that virtually every fact is checked and double-checked — as much as can be accomplished on our surprisingly short production schedule. That's no easy task because *Illinois Issues* provides a lot of facts in each and every issue. She's also my essential "soothing presence" when the going gets toughest on that day before we send the magazine to the printer.

Debi Edmund is our "last eyes." She reads each issue once and once only, a couple of days before we send it off. Her talent is spotting tiny gaps between letters and big gaps in thinking. In fact, we've come to measure ourselves by the number of marked-up pages she faxes back.

Diana Nelson is our art director. The magazine is only one of her responsibilities, yet each month she manages to block out time to bring our content to life in ways we couldn't envision. She negotiates with artists and photographers and coordinates our efforts with the printer.

Rodd Whelpley usually edits books, but we convince him to help out with the magazine as much as we can — to write, edit, share ideas. He's our backup grammarian and humorist, and we count on him to track baseball and licenses-for-bribes investigation stats.

Charlie Wheeler may be our most valuable player. No one else can parse a budget like he can, or, for that matter, remember virtually all of the details of every government action since 1970. Charlie writes our must-read "Politics" column every month.

Our regional columnists rotate their responsibilities: Madeleine Doubek of the *Daily Herald* from the suburbs; Pat Gauen of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from Metro East; and, our newest addition from Chicago, Bob Davis, formerly of the *Chicago Tribune*.

In fact, there's an extended family of writers, artists and photographers who contribute regularly, as do our columnists, for not much more than this little bit of credit.

Someone once called this magazine a monthly miracle. And it is. The editorial team consists of two full-time staff members (one editor, one reporter). Everyone else is working part-time, on borrowed time or as a free-lancer.

So thanks again for another year of monthly miracles.

And have a good summer. ☐

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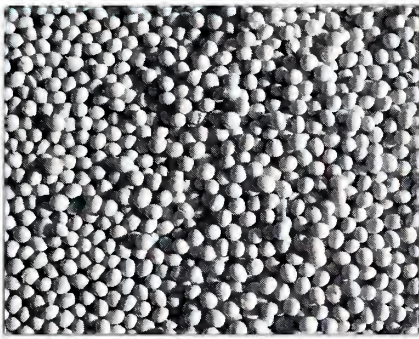
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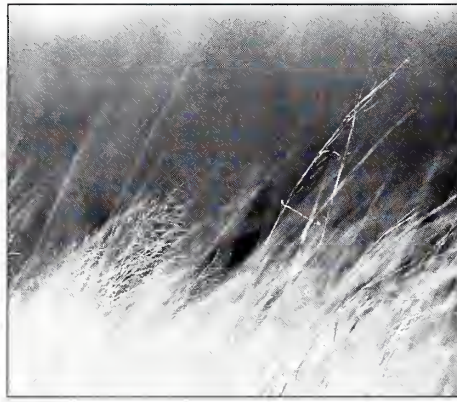
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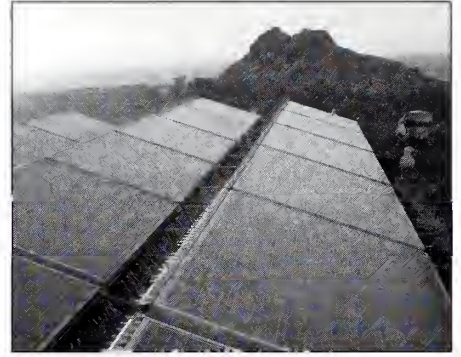
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## Trapping and selling animals is part of a great Illinois tradition

by Aaron Chambers

Joe House is out the door by 3 a.m. in the winter months. He departs each morning to patrol some 30 farms around Princeville, his hometown just north of Peoria, for raccoon. He surveys his traps for four hours each morning, then heads to the local high school to teach agriculture. Each year, he says, he usually catches between 100 and 150 raccoons. In 1997, a great year for him, he caught 350.

House enjoys the sport of fur trapping. But after a few weeks of trudging around in the cold and snow during the trapping season, which runs from early November to mid-January, it takes more than fun to motivate him: He admits he can use the money. Only half-jokingly, he remarks that his catch during the 1997 season helped finance his wedding.

Like thousands of trappers in Illinois, and throughout North America for that matter, House catches raccoons and other such animals and sells their pelts to supplement his income. The fur is removed, treated and, in most cases, shipped abroad to garment manufacturers in Greece. The garments then are sold to fur-lovers in countries such as Russia and China.

In this state, the fur trade's roots run deep. When 17th century French *voyageurs* explored the Illinois Country, they were motivated by the

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*Of course, this state's  
contemporary fur trade is not  
nearly as lucrative as it was.*

*But fur hunters and trappers  
still collect raccoon and  
muskrat pelts.*

pursuit of wealth, and the dominant business was harvesting and selling the fur of beaver, fox, muskrat and other wild animals. So Joe House's efforts to raise a bit of extra cash by trapping native animals is part of a great Illinois tradition.

Of course, this state's contemporary fur trade is not nearly as lucrative as it was. But fur hunters and trappers still collect raccoon and muskrat pelts. To a lesser extent, they also harvest beaver, mink, weasel, opossum, coyote and varieties of fox.

Though it's no longer thriving, the Illinois market appears to be making a comeback. During the season beginning in 2000, the total number of pelts sold by furtakers was up 13 percent — to 117,554 — from the 1999 season, and the total value of those pelts increased 63 percent to \$682,176, according to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

This does not include those animals that were caught with a special "nuisance" abatement permit. Under a natural resources department rule, such animals can't be sold for a profit; they must be released or destroyed.

Bob Bluett, a wildlife biologist with the department, says, "If you let them keep the pelt, our feeling is there might be some temptation, instead of setting the trap in the attic or at an access point, that you set your trap next to the bird feeder and catch 72 squirrels or 33 raccoons."

As for the animals collected for sale, statistics on the 2001 season were not available in mid-June. But House and other observers say the season was consistent with, if not better than, the 2000 season.

"There's a lot of optimism out there that prices can't stay at the low levels they were," House says. "Fur prices have gone up, but they're nowhere near what they were in the late '70s or early '80s. But they still are at a level where it's starting to interest a few people to look back into it."

The wild fur trade in Illinois peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s and has dwindled since, with bursts in the mid-1980s and late-1990s. In the 1978 season, the average raccoon pelt sold for \$27.25. The following year, the average beaver pelt went for \$14.40, while muskrat sold for an average of \$6.35 per pelt.

Prices in recent years, as well as the number of animals harvested, are far down from those figures. Raccoon pelts sold for \$6.30 in 2000, while beaver sold for \$9.80 and muskrat sold for \$2.45. Yet statistics for the 2000 season show prices improved over the previous two years, and fur traders are hopeful that climb will continue.

Take the \$6.30 commanded by the pelt of an average raccoon in the 2000 season. While that's down 77 percent from the 1978 season's \$27.25, it's up 50 percent from the \$4.20 in the 1999 season.

Last winter, that upward trend continued. Greg Groenewold, president of Groenewold Fur and Wool Co. in Forreston, one of the



Midwest's largest fur buyers, estimates raccoon pelts — the state's top fur export — went for 25 percent to 30 percent more in 2001 than in 2000. "I think fur is a lot more in vogue than it was," he says.

Paul Kelley, a Hudson-based trapper and president of the Illinois Trappers Association, is cautiously optimistic. "It's kind of been an up and down situation for several years," he says. "This last year we saw higher prices and a little more interest, and we might see that again this year."

The fur harvest in Illinois corresponds to the price paid for each pelt. As prices go up, fur traders say, more furtakers hunt or trap the animals. Then again, furtakers can be impatient.

"We've had a couple of years in the last eight or 10 years where the prices come up one year. You'd have more interest generated the following year and yet the prices didn't continue to increase, if not drop back a little bit, and people would drop by the wayside again," Kelley says.

There are several reasons for the fluctuation in the number of animals harvested and in the prices they command, not the least of which is demand. That factor, half the equation in any industry, is especially unpredictable in fur trading.

In the United States, animal rights groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals have helped limit demand for fur with aggressive campaigns portraying fur trapping as cruel to animals. These activists have been known to attack fur coats, on the backs of pedestrians, with spray paint.

Russia, which imports the bulk of American raccoon pelts, has in recent years been economically unstable. During the fur harvest following the collapse of that country's currency in 1998, the number of raccoon pelts harvested in Illinois dropped 41 percent, to 163,320 from 278,680 in 1997. At the same time, the average price of each pelt dropped 53 percent, from \$10.50 to \$4.90.

There also are trends in fashion, perhaps the most whimsical factor of all. "Fashion swings are like men's ties — one year it's narrow, the next year

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***The fur harvest in Illinois corresponds to the price paid for each pelt. As prices go up, fur traders say, more furtakers hunt or trap the animals.***

it's wide. We run into all those factors," says Bob McQuay, executive director of the Wild Fur Shippers Council at the Ontario-based North American Fur Auctions, the largest fur auction house in North America.

Weather also can affect the fur trade, as cold winter temperatures and heavy snowfall can slow the efforts of hunters and trappers.

Yet there are reasons to expect the fur trade to rebound. The Russian economy is recovering. The voices of anti-fur activists are quieting or, at the least, failing to resonate with consumers, fur traders contend. And fur may be becoming more fashionable.

"There is a noticeable increase in the demand for fur in the [fashion show] runways, and therefore there's a higher price being paid for most of the species, and therefore there is more interest in the production side from the trapping community," McQuay says.

He argues fur is becoming more stylish for several reasons. Wild fur can be more attractive to designers than fur from animals raised on a farm because of its variety in textures and styles. Young designers are beginning to treat fur more as a fabric, incorporating it into garments with other fabrics, rather than using straight fur. And designers are manipulating fur by coloring or trimming it to make it natty and more comfortable to wear in the summer.

"My guess is everything is looking pretty good for fur right now, and usually these cycles last a while," McQuay says.

Then there's the supply side of the equation. And, at least in Illinois, there are few complaints about an

inadequate population of raccoon, beaver and other wild animals.

Though beaver were thought to be extinct in Illinois in the early 1900s due to hunting and trapping, those rodents are considered by the natural resources department to be common throughout the state. While fewer beavers were harvested in 2000 than 1999, the average price for each pelt increased almost 20 percent, from \$8.20 to \$9.80.

Raccoon, the top export, are considered by the natural resources department to be abundant, as many homeowners who get their garbage cans raided and their attics invaded surely would testify.

Muskrat, on the other hand, are disappearing from this state, according to fur traders, and that trend is reflected in the dramatic decrease in pelts collected by trappers. In 1979, there were 460,674 muskrat harvested. By 2000, that number had dropped 96 percent, to 17,894.

There are different theories on why muskrat have disappeared. But most observers agree that the animal's natural habitat — aquatic areas such as marshes — is depleted as wetlands are drained and farmers install more efficient water drainage systems to remove water more quickly from their fields.

"Changes in hydrology cause their numbers to go down," says Bluett, the wildlife biologist. "You're keeping that water from collecting or ponding; you don't get marshes where you used to get marshes."

Bluett says a department study conducted 10 years ago debunked one popular theory on the muskrat's fate — that the animals are dying from ingesting agricultural pesticides. The study, he says, failed to detect pesticides in tested muskrat.

At any rate, harvest numbers and prices generally are up. And furtakers want more.

"A lot of people feel that this might be the turnaround, that we might see a steady increase," says House, the Princeville trapper. "They haven't hit the '97 levels yet [the last burst in raccoon price], but they're getting there and that's what people are hoping." □

# BRIEFLY

## Turtle proofing the tracks

**T**he Blanding's turtle is fairly mobile. For a turtle. Still, it can't outrun a train. That's why one railroad development company will be giving the threatened animal safe passage over a newly constructed railroad spur that cuts across part of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, a 15,000-acre conservation area located 40 miles southwest of Chicago.

CenterPoint Properties of Oak Brook, as part of its plan to build an industrial park and rail facility on 2,200 acres adjacent to the prairie, swapped some land with Midewin in order to lay a rail corridor to the nearby main line of the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Co. But the spur is near the marshy ground favored by the Blanding's. And the 8-to-10-inch Blanding's (as well as other small turtles) have been known to get trapped between the rails where they dehydrate or starve.

Environmental consultants for CenterPoint recommended a simple, fairly cheap solution: turtle crossings in the form of ramps and culverts. The ramps are 2-foot-wide asphalt strips over the tracks coming in and out of the park, and the culverts beneath the rail lines serve not only as animal crossings but allow for water management on the floodplain area. Jim Ford, a vice president for CenterPoint, says the company has installed four or five ramps and more than 50 culverts.

The plan was part of the company's



*A Blanding's turtle*

### About the Blanding's turtle

**Description:** Five to 10 inches long, with a high-domed, black shell with white or yellow spots and a yellow throat.

**Lifespan:** Up to 70 years.

**Habitat:** Wet prairies with room to roam up to two kilometers at a time.

**Food:** Crayfish, tadpoles, worms, snails, insects.

**Illinois status:** On the state's threatened species list. Found in northern Illinois.

due diligence. "We work very closely when developing our property there with the Midewin," says Ford. As a bonus, the "expense of the pass-overs was trivial."

But will the turtle tunnels and crossings actually work? Maybe, says Mike Redmer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "I have some experience that says yes, they'll go under a culvert. I was radio tracking some [outside the Midewin] a few years ago and got some funny signals that indicated to me that they were under a culvert. I couldn't find the opening of the culvert, but I suspect they were under my feet. So, I think they will use the railroad culverts." The culverts also provide safe passage for other reptiles and such small mammals as muskrats and raccoons.

But, says Redmer, the ramps may be a double-edged sword.

The logic behind the ramps is that people think Blanding's hoist themselves over one rail but then aren't able to hoist themselves over the second rail. Redmer

thinks it's more likely a turtle finds its way into the middle of the tracks by passing through a gap near a railroad tie on one side of the tracks, but then it is unable to find another gap to get out. With a ramp, a turtle may begin to go up and over the tracks, but if it changes direction while on the ramp, it will find itself deposited in the middle of the rails, the very situation the ramp was installed to avoid.

"Another viable option would be for the company to maintain the ballast between the ties. I don't think the ramp is a cure-all," says Redmer. "And you're not talking about the brightest animal in the world."

In turtle terms, the

Blanding's travel long distances. Redmer says they can go a kilometer or two in a space of two weeks. "Of all [Illinois] aquatic turtles, they're ones that walk around on land the most."

That trait is one reason the turtle is on the state's threatened species list. The turtles were once common in the northern half of Illinois, but draining the marshlands and tiling for farming cut into their habitat. And preservation areas of only a few hundred acres aren't large enough to support turtles with the wanderlust of the Blanding's. There are probably a dozen or more preservation areas in the Chicago region where Blanding's may be found, says Redmer. But most of those are 500 acres or less. "They're not necessarily going to stay in those boundaries. They're going to try to walk out, and they're either going to get hit by a car or walk into somebody's back yard and become a pet. Things like roads and railroads just contribute to their woes. So, the bigger conservation



issue with that species is having a large preserve for them.”

That’s why the crossings at the Midewin site are worth the effort, even though there are certainly less than 100 of the rare turtles there, says Bill Glass, who works at the prairie for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. In fact, the last documented sighting at the preserve was by Redmer in 1993 when he saw eight to 10 of them near where CenterPoint’s tracks are now located.

But, the size of the Midewin, situated on land that was once an army arsenal, gives the turtle’s population room to grow and supports the topographical diversity the turtle favors. And the ongoing prairie restoration at Midewin could induce a population boost, says Glass.

Whether the population does rebound or whether the turtles ever actually use the crossings remains to be seen. But the ramps and the pipe culverts are waiting. It’s up to chance, really. “But it’s a better solution than not doing anything at all,” says Ford.

*Rodd Whelpley*

## **Illinois farmers could be part of the state’s energy solution**

The new farm bill approved by Congress in May provides more than \$200 million for technologies that convert wind and plant matter to power.

The \$190 billion agriculture measure, which boosts federal crop subsidies for Midwestern farmers, also funds several new clean energy development programs: a total of \$405 million over six years.

Farmers, ranchers and owners of small rural businesses could receive financial help in the form of low-interest loans, loan guarantees and grants to buy wind power and other renewable energy systems and to improve energy efficiency. And dollars will be available for biomass research and development, incentives for federal purchase of biobased products and a biodiesel fuel education program.

The measure also provides funds for the Commodity Credit Corporation Bioenergy Program to increase production of ethanol and biodiesel.

“The legislation is beneficial to farmers because it brings a new focus to renewable energy,” says U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, Republican of Urbana.

“Renewable fuels are the trend because they make us less dependent on foreign oil and they put back in use bushel upon bushel of harvested grain in Illinois.”

*Beverley Scobell*

### **Update**

- The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Atkins v. Virginia* that to execute the mentally retarded is unconstitutional because they can’t meet standards for culpability (see *Illinois Issues*, June page 17 and 22).



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## BRIEFLY

### Cemetery cleanup restores our heritage

When Jacob Rice had to bury his wife Mary, he chose a spot on a hill that overlooked the fertile fields of their farm in Ogle County. Mary's burial in 1839 was the first in Rice Cemetery, which became the final resting place of 43 pioneers, including one Civil War veteran. The burials in that northern Illinois cemetery continued until 1891. Over much of the next century, cattle and deer were the most frequent, and none-too-careful, visitors. Headstones were knocked over; weeds grew thick.

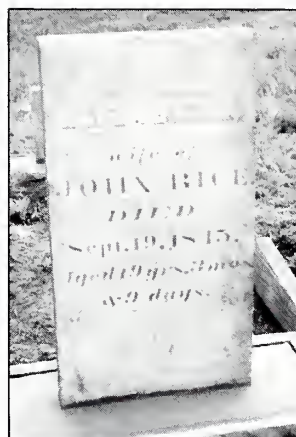
But local historical society volunteers, with the help of the state comptroller, are restoring Rice Cemetery. "We hear from people statewide who ask us for help restoring cemeteries in their communities," says Illinois Comptroller Daniel Hynes, whose office is responsible for licensing and auditing cemeteries.

No one is responsible, though, for the estimated thousands of abandoned

cemeteries in the state. Hynes says he feels "helpless" without the statutory authority or the dollars to help. Nonetheless, staff members work with local volunteer groups to identify and restore abandoned cemeteries.

In Ogle County, the Leaf River Historical Society had been working for five years to clean up Rice Cemetery. "But we really needed a fence to keep out the animals that kept knocking over the stones," says Betty Croft, a member of the group. The comptroller's office helped arrange for the Oregon Future Farmers of America organization to put up a fence with materials donated by a local business.

"Through this program, we have learned these abandoned and neglected cemeteries are a treasure of information and a key to our past," says Hynes.



*The stone of Jacob Rice's daughter-in-law has a new base.*

Indeed, one bit of Illinois history was recounted at a ceremony recognizing the cleanup of the 1850 Democrat Cemetery in Woodford County. Abraham Carlock, who donated the land for the cemetery and the town that bears his name, was so faithful to his party he wouldn't allow Abraham Lincoln onto his property until the first Adlai Stevenson vouched for him. That party passion

extended beyond death so that only those who shared Carlock's political views could be buried in the cemetery. Not to be outdone, his neighbor and political rival, Philip Benson, a committed Whig, set aside property for a Republican cemetery.

So far, nearly 30 old Illinois cemeteries have been restored.

*Beverley Scobell*

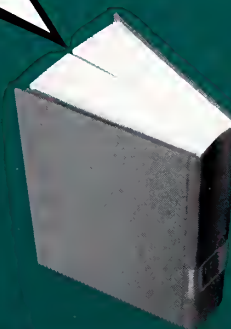
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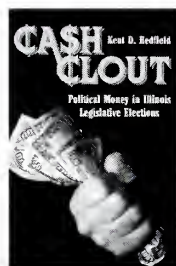




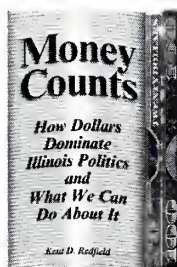
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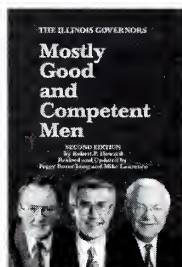
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## PILOT PROJECT Powering with corn

Researchers will begin tests this month in Pekin on the performance, durability and reliability of an ethanol-powered fuel cell designed to generate electricity. "This has never been done before, a fuel cell run on ethanol for any length of time," says Tom Richards of Caterpillar Inc. of Peoria, one of the partners in the experiment.

Caterpillar is joined in the project by Williams BioEnergy in Pekin and Nuvera Fuel Cells of Cambridge, Mass. The two-year program will cost \$2.5 million. Grants from the U.S. Department of Energy and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs covers some of it.

The system will use anhydrous denatured ethanol as the base fuel. A reformer will generate hydrogen gas that will combine with oxygen to produce electricity. Reformers, says Gary Welch of Williams BioEnergy, can convert any fuel fed into them, but "the only renewable one is ethanol." The stationary unit, which will produce about 15 kilowatts of power — enough to power five homes — will run continuously for 4,000 hours. Richards says evaluators need about six months to understand how an ethanol-powered fuel cell works and to remove any technical uncertainties.

One objective is to understand how this method of generating electricity might be applied to commercial, industrial and residential power needs. The experiment also will determine whether the system can be used to power buses, cars and other vehicles.

"This technology is still in the early stages, but other states are supporting it," says David Loos of the commerce and community affairs department. Michigan is setting up programs so jobs will remain in that state if automobile manufacturers switch to fuel cells. Ohio is offering tax breaks for research and development.

Fuel cells are nearly twice as efficient as internal combustion engines and emit almost no harmful pollutants. Water is the only byproduct, says Welch.

*Beverley Scobell*

## IF AT FIRST ...

### Governor calls special budget session

Eight state facilities, including two prisons and more than 3,000 state jobs, will be quashed under a budget finalized by the General Assembly during a special session in early June. These and other cuts were made to fill an estimated \$2 billion hole in the budget for the fiscal year that began July 1.

Meanwhile, Gov. George Ryan won his fight to privatize food and commissary services in the state prison system when the Illinois Senate, during the special session, failed to override his veto of a measure that would have precluded the state from hiring outside contractors to perform those duties.

Ryan vetoed portions of the estimated \$53 billion budget for fiscal year 2003, passed in an overtime session, because the legislature added \$277.5 million in state spending above what he had recommended in a Memorial Day budget address. And while lawmakers did raise taxes on casinos and cigarettes to buttress spending, they failed to pass an additional tax increase Ryan had recommended on real estate transactions. Those actions, the governor contended, put a \$500 million hole in the budget sent to him.

So Ryan made more than \$500 million in cuts and called lawmakers back to Springfield. The GOP-controlled Senate voted to restore about \$55 million in funds. The Democrat-controlled House concurred with that action.

While the governor praised lawmakers for casting difficult but necessary votes to keep spending down, another special session could be necessary if state revenues continue to drop dramatically.

The state facilities set to close, the corresponding job losses and the estimated cost savings in this fiscal year for each closure include the Sheridan Correctional Center in LaSalle County with 424 employees at \$28.6 million; the juvenile prison in Valley View with 171 employees at \$12.5 million; the Lincoln Developmental Center in Lincoln with 550 employees at \$7 million; and the Zeller Mental Health Center in Peoria with 243 employees at \$5.7 million.

Three prison work camps in Hanna City, Paris and Green County also will close, as will a state Department of Children and Family Services facility on Chicago's West Side. Opening day for a prison in Thomson and a juvenile prison in Rushville is postponed. Total savings for these closures and postponements is estimated at \$38.6 million.

Savings from privatization of food and commissary services at the state Department of Corrections is estimated at \$25 million. AFSCME Council 31, a union representing government employees, argues that hiring outside contractors will jeopardize employee safety. The union sued to stop the move — and the loss of 651 state jobs.

Another 650 jobs, including 490 sergeant positions in corrections, were earmarked for elimination under spending cuts previously announced.

Additional cuts finalized during the special session mean college students who take more than four years to complete their studies will have a tougher time getting state scholarships. State public health officials will lose money to help educate minorities about preventing AIDS or HIV. Funds for free school lunch programs were scaled back. And people who care for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled won't get a 2 percent cost-of-living increase.

Lawmakers did save some programs. They voted to restore \$47 million in funds to elementary and secondary schools, the bulk of which can be used for day-to-day expenses and operations such as busing. They also restored \$5.8 million for public university operations.

Meanwhile, the governor was busy in June disposing of substantive bills sent to him this spring. He approved legislation that permits the Chicago Public Schools to levy a new property tax to reap as much as \$400 million for school construction.

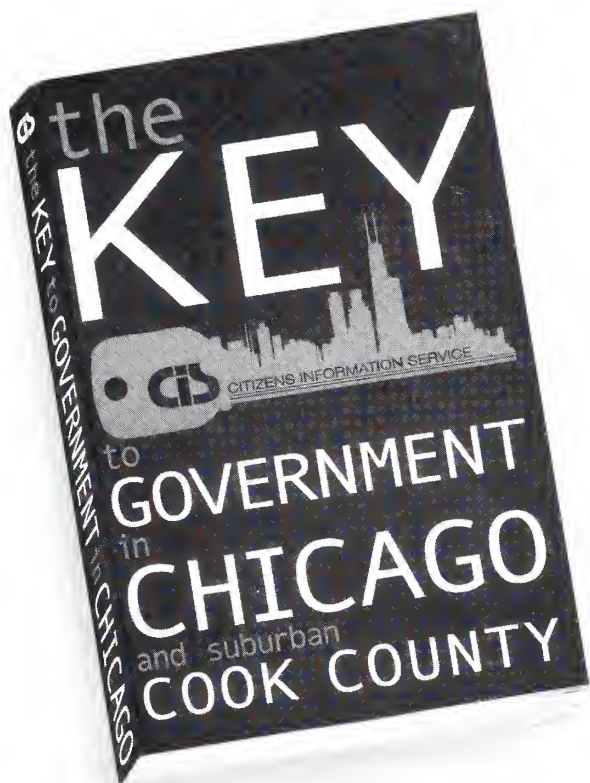
Following the special session, the governor praised the Senate for sustaining 90 percent of his cuts. "It was painful but they understood how necessary it was to make those cuts in the state budget," he said. "They were difficult cuts, ones that nobody really wanted to make, including myself, but it was what we needed to do in the face of the worst revenue picture that we've had in this state in almost 50 years."

*Aaron Chambers*



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# Back to the atom

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Nuclear plants have been too expensive to build. Now a convergence of factors means such ambitious projects might be viable again

by Daniel C. Vock

Illustration by Daisy Langston Juarez

Illinois' largest energy producer, Exelon, generated a buzz in April when the company revealed it is studying the feasibility of building a nuclear reactor in the small down-state community of Clinton.

Such a proposal would have been unheard of in Illinois just five years ago. That's when Exelon's corporate predecessor, Commonwealth Edison, was a lightning rod for worries about its poor safety record and inefficient production.

For years, the costs of building a nuclear plant were prohibitive. And strict regulations deterred companies from adding to the nation's stock of nuclear reactors.

But now, a convergence of several factors means such ambitious projects might once again be viable. Nuclear power plants have reached new levels of efficiency over the past 10 years. At the same time, the proliferation of computers has spurred an already growing demand for electricity. And concerns about the environmental effects of coal and gas or hydro generators continue to increase.

Today, half of the energy Illinois uses is generated by nuclear power, compared to 22 percent in the nation as a whole. In fact, with 11 reactors in use, Illinois already has more than any other state in the union.

There's renewed political support

for nuclear power, too. President George W. Bush called for a quicker approval process for new reactors as part of his national energy policy, lending federal support for expansion.

Much has changed in the past five years. Rolling blackouts and skyrocketing rates in California demonstrated to the nation the far-reaching effects that short-sighted energy policies can have on businesses and residential customers. "All of these [problems] can be addressed by nuclear power," argues Craig Nesbit, Exelon's director of communications for nuclear operations.

But expanding the Clinton site to include a new reactor is far from a done deal. The preliminary notice Exelon filed with the federal government allows the company to explore the feasibility of that option, but doesn't lock it into any commitments. And several groups already are vowing to block nuclear expansion.

Furthermore, Howard Learner, the executive director of the Environmental Law and Policy Center, argues that investors will be wary of backing such expensive projects. And, he contends, the public will line up against more nuclear reactors.

"There's all sorts of talk about new nuclear plants, but it's all smoke and

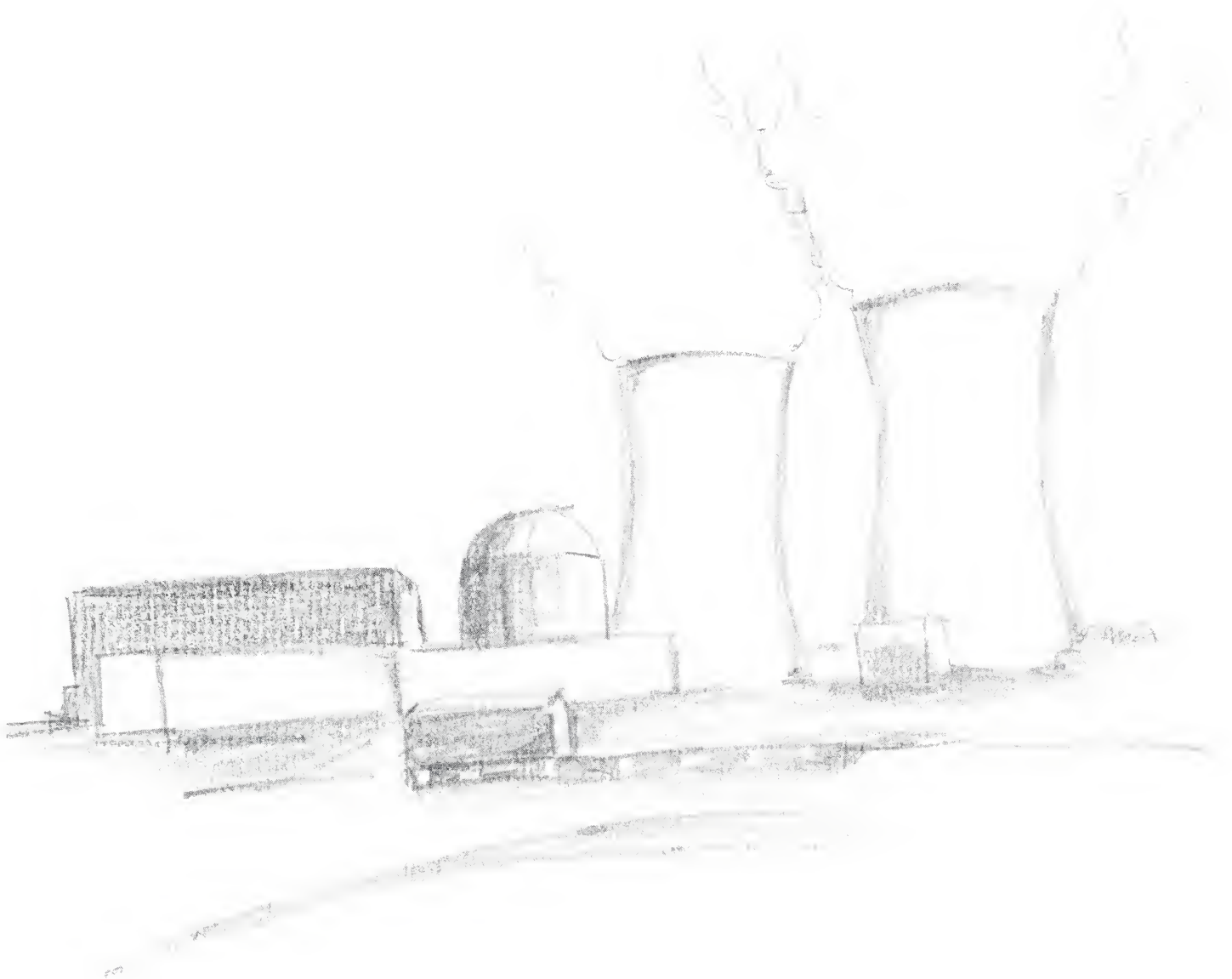
no fire," Learner says. "The reality is nobody wants to finance it, because it's a risky venture and [power companies] don't want to put shareholders' money at risk."

The existing plant at the 14,300-acre Clinton site, which opened in 1987, cost more than \$4 billion to build. Because of high construction costs, Clinton produces some of the most expensive power in the Midwest, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

While the up-front costs are significantly higher for nuclear energy, the cost of generating energy by breaking apart uranium is lower than burning coal or gas. And proponents of atomic energy note that the process releases only steam into the atmosphere, whereas coal and gas plants release sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and other greenhouse gases.

Yet, accidents at Three Mile Island in the United States and Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union highlighted many of the risks of nuclear power, especially if the plants are not well-built or well-run. The fallout from the 1979 partial meltdown at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania released radioactive gas, spurring the evacuation of children and pregnant women. The response included tough federal regulations that at times quadrupled the cost of





constructing new reactors.

Closer to home, Commonwealth Edison took suburban plants off-line in 1998 following questions about their safety and the cost of bringing them into full compliance with federal standards.

In the 1990s, existing nuclear reactors increased their output by 13 percent, but they still lost ground to coal and gas plants during that decade. Now they may face competition from alternative energy sources: solar,

wind and biomass.

Illinois has a broad diversity of energy sources, especially compared to other states in the Midwest, says Jim Monk, president of the Illinois Energy Association. Indiana, where Monk once chaired that state's utility regulatory agency, relies on coal-fired plants to produce 95 percent of its electricity. In fact, all of Illinois' neighbors depend on coal for at least 70 percent of their electricity production.

Monk notes that the state of Illinois has promoted all of the sources of energy it uses for electricity, most recently pumping \$3.5 billion into southern Illinois' ailing coal industry. The money was designated primarily to provide loans to developers of generating plants at coal mines, to help pay for scrubbers that will clean the state's high-sulphur coal and for transmission lines to send coal-generated energy north to the Chicago area.

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*They pointed to a group of investors in a South African experiment using a radically different reactor design. The investors have started working with federal authorities to discuss the possibility of bringing that design to the United States.*

Still, the cost of that coal-generated energy is on the rise because of heightened pollution controls. At the same time, natural gas prices are extremely volatile, as customers found out two winters ago.

Meanwhile, Illinois is widely regarded as a pro-nuclear state, but Nesbit says that was not the catalyst for the decision to launch a preliminary study for a new reactor at the Clinton site. He says the choice has more to do with the specifics of the site than with the fact that it's in Illinois.

That site, which is 60 miles northeast of Springfield, was originally designed to house more generators than the one currently in use, and Clinton's location, Nesbit says, would make it easy to distribute the added electricity.

Exelon has a hand in running all of the state's 11 reactors, which are located at six different sites in northern and central Illinois. It also is responsible for three reactors that have been taken out of service — two at Zion in the northern suburbs and one at the Dresden station, which is southwest of Joliet.

The next reactor that will require recertification also is located at the Dresden site. It's not up for review until 2006.

A report released in February by Gov. George Ryan's energy cabinet encouraged Exelon to extend the life of its nuclear reactors by making improvements to the plants that would allow them to be recertified.

In the meantime, the cabinet credits federal deregulation efforts for spurring increased efficiencies in the state's nuclear plants. Those improvements have increased production in the state by an amount equal to two new reactors, according to the report.

Harry Stoller, director of the energy division of the Illinois Commerce Commission, says a 1997 state deregulation statute also gave Exelon incentives to increase efficiency at its nuclear plants. The new law made it easier, under certain circumstances, to transfer ownership of nuclear power plants from heavily regulated utilities to separate power-generating

companies.

That's exactly what Exelon did. Unicom, the former corporate parent of Commonwealth Edison, and Philadelphia's PECO Energy merged in 2000. As part of the transition, Exelon separated its power plants from the utilities. Now Exelon Generation is in charge of making power while Commonwealth Edison and PECO deliver it and sell it to customers.

In Illinois, the rates that Commonwealth Edison can charge its residential customers are frozen until at least 2007. But there are no such controls on the prices that producers charge utilities for the electricity, Stoller says.

That means if Exelon Generation produces more energy at lower costs, the parent company can pocket those savings. At the same time, Exelon cannot pass along costs for being inefficient to its customers.

"The result is that they're going to run [their power plants] better," Stoller says.

Ryan's energy cabinet noted that power companies, including Exelon, are looking into new reactor designs that promise to be cheaper and safer than those currently in use. They pointed to a group of the investors in a South African experiment using a radically different reactor design. The investors have started working with federal authorities to discuss the possibility of bringing that design to the United States.

The energy cabinet also called on federal authorities to settle on a national nuclear waste repository, which could speed the process of dismantling and cleaning up the two reactors at Zion.

All of these signs point to a turnaround for an industry that only recently appeared obsolete. Now, new technology and a more hospitable political climate could produce a resurgence of nuclear power in Illinois. □

*Daniel C. Vock is a Statehouse reporter for the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.*



# On the. prairie

restoring our heritage

---

Photography by Chris Young

Once there were bison and fields of tall big bluestem grass. By July, much of central Illinois was alight with the yellows and purples of goldenrod, false sunflower, prairie blazing star and wild bergamot. European settlers coming upon this scene looked to the plentiful north and south pointing compass plant to find their way across meadows that sprawled as far as the eye could see.

Miles upon miles of vibrant wildflowers and grasses that stretched toward the sky ceded long ago to farmland, housing developments and highways. But around 1820, about 22 million acres of prairie defined the landscape of much of Illinois. Today, less than one-hundredth of 1 percent of that prairie remains, says Robert Szafoni, a natural heritage biologist with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

But pockets have been restored along roadsides, railroad rights of way and in public and private preserves, giving Illinoisans a sense of the Grand Prairie in all its glory. Photographer Chris Young of the *State Journal-Register* in Springfield has searched out those scenes in recent years, finding evidence of our prairie heritage in such spots as the Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area in Cass County and the Anderson Prairie Park in Pana. He's come across traces of once-abundant prairie wildlife as well. Prairie chickens once numbered in the millions in Illinois, but now only a few hundred remain in such preserves as Prairie Ridge State Natural Area in Jasper County. In trying to learn more about the subjects of his photography, Young says, he has developed an appreciation for the lessons we can take from our natural heritage — for instance, prairie flowers that dig deep in the earth to find plentiful stores of water.

He struggles, he says, to find a perspective that could give him the unobstructed view of prairie that settlers had. And with the ongoing restoration of large sites such as the U.S. Forest Service's Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie at the former Joliet Arsenal his goal seems more realistic than it once was.

*The Editors*

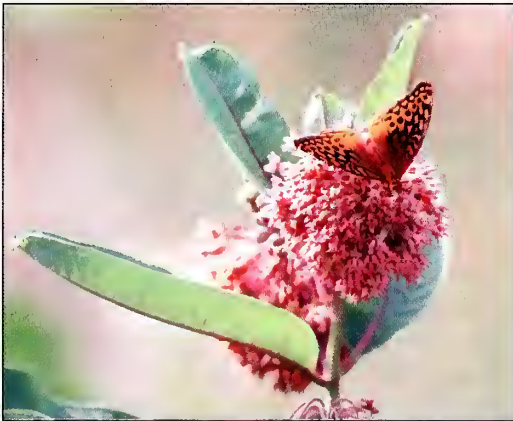


*Carpenter Park, Springfield*

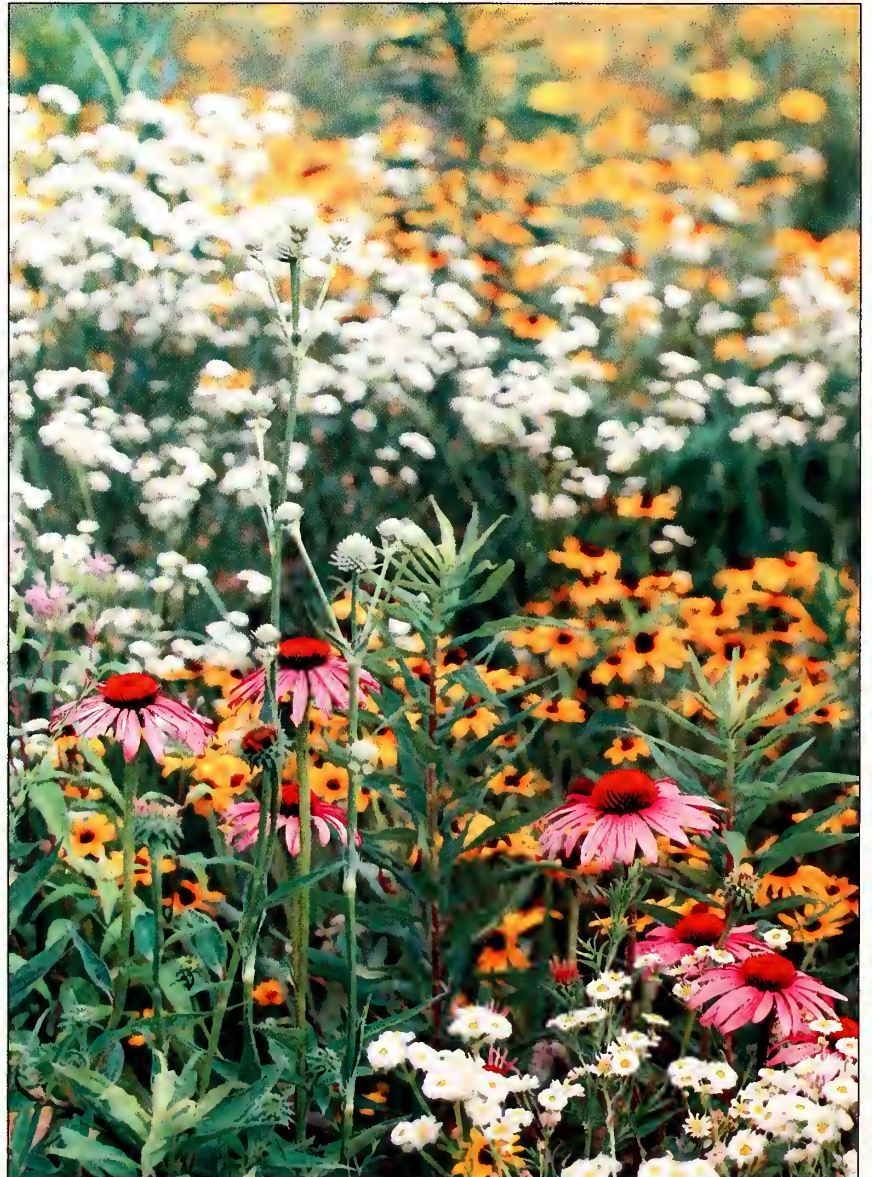




*Viceroy on milkweed*

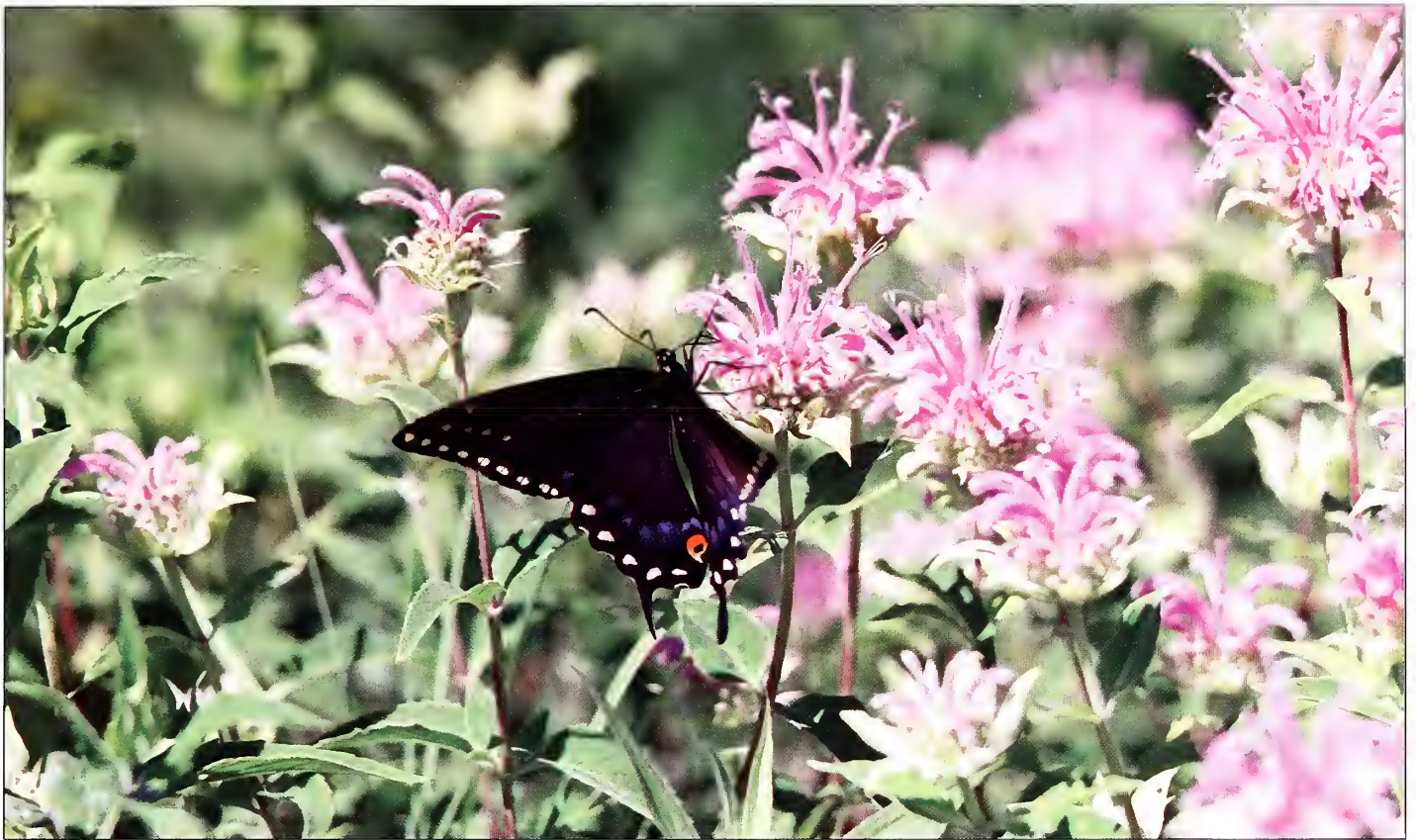


*Great spangled fritillary*



*Jim Edgar wildlife area, Cass County*





*Black swallowtail on bergamot*



*Emily Podeschi, Anderson Prairie Park, Pana*





*Big bluestem and goldenrod at Anderson Prairie Park*





*Rare Indian paintbrush*





*Male greater prairie chicken*



*Prairie blazing star*



*Compass plant*





*Buckeye on goldenrod*



*Prairie chickens, Prairie Ridge, Jasper County*



*Gray-headed coneflower*





*Wildlife Prairie Park, near Peoria*



*Storm clouds, Carpenter Park, Springfield*



# The power of the soybean

Though the diesel engine was designed to run on vegetable oil, it's most often powered by petroleum. But that's changing. And Illinois farmers stand to gain

by Aaron Chambers

Rudolf Diesel might be amazed at all the hoopla. When the late German engineer demonstrated his new high-compression engine at the 1900 World's Fair, he powered it with peanut oil. Nowadays, peanut oil is sooner found in a restaurant deep fryer than in the fuel tank of a truck or tractor. Though the diesel engine was designed to run on vegetable oil, it's most often powered by petroleum.

But more than a century after Diesel's high-compression engine made its debut, vegetable oil is gaining ground.

Proponents of so-called biodiesel, vegetable oil that's blended with petroleum, have redoubled efforts to win a bigger share of the nation's fuel market. First and foremost, they're pushing tax incentives on Capitol Hill, in Springfield and in other state legislatures in an effort to make their product more economically competitive. And

they've stepped up their campaign to sell the idea to farmers, trucking companies and local governments that own and operate diesel-powered equipment.

***They've made headway.*** Backers of biodiesel — and its cousin, the gas-and-corn-blended ethanol — point to the environment, the economy and foreign policy to make their case. They argue that biodiesel burns cleaner,

reducing sooty exhaust and other toxic emissions. They say it burns more efficiently because it contains more oxygen. They say it could help reduce dependence on oil from the Middle East, though diesel fuel typically is blended with only 1 percent or 2 percent of the additive. And they say increased demand for biodiesel would eliminate a surplus of soybean oil — typically used in biodiesel — and boost soybean prices.

Photograph by Warren Gretz, courtesy of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory



This last point is of particular interest in Illinois, which runs neck-and-neck with Iowa each year for the highest soybean production in the nation.

"As the industry grows, the soybean farmer is betting on more and more soybeans being used in the production of biodiesel," says Dave Loos, manager of the alternative energy development program in the Illinois Department

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*No question, if biodiesel's proponents realize their goal, Illinois farmers stand to gain. The U.S. Department of Agriculture calculates the price of a bushel of soybeans, which was at \$4.98 in mid-June, would increase by 17 cents each year over the next decade if demand for soy biodiesel is at 200 million gallons during each of those years.*

of Commerce and Community Affairs.

For the moment, there's a huge surplus of the oil. American soy oil stocks are around 2.5 billion pounds, about four times "normal" levels, according to the National Biodiesel Board, an advocacy group. Jenna Higgins, the board's communications director, says, "Biodiesel is the No. 1 way to use up the glut of soybean oil on the market. And as more biodiesel is used, that's obviously going to increase the value of soybean oil, and that in turn will increase the value of the entire bean."

No question, if biodiesel's proponents realize their goal, Illinois farmers stand to gain. The U.S. Department of Agriculture calculates the price of a bushel of soybeans, which was trading at \$4.98 in mid-June, would increase by 17 cents each year over the next decade if demand for soy biodiesel is at 200 million gallons during each of those years. That's an extra \$1.70 per bushel in a state that produces about 480 million bushels of soybeans per year.

Closer to home, if the 1.8 billion gallons of diesel fuel consumed in this state each year contained 2 percent biodiesel, annual gross farm income in Illinois would increase by at least \$18 million, according to an analysis by the National Biodiesel Board. That figure would increase to \$183 million if the fuel contained 20 percent biodiesel. This higher blend, though not as common, is marketed to those diesel consumers who are trying to drastically reduce emissions.

As for environmental concerns, the board's analysis suggests that using the 2 percent blend statewide would reduce emissions of particulate matter by 154,000 pounds, unburned hydrocarbons by 205,000 pounds and carbon monoxide by 1.8 million pounds — reductions the board says would improve air quality and protect the earth's ozone layer. If all diesel was blended at 20 percent soybean oil, emissions of particulate matter would be reduced by 1.5 million pounds, unburned hydrocarbons by 2 million pounds and carbon monoxide by 18 million pounds.

**There are drawbacks.** For starters, biodiesel is more expensive. The cost of one gallon of diesel fuel generally increases by 1 cent for each percentage point of soy blend. Further, engines may need to be modified to run on the higher blends.

There are political considerations, too. The petroleum industry, which stands to lose if alternative fuels gain, fiercely opposes efforts to subsidize the evolving biodiesel industry.

David Sykuta, executive director of the Illinois Petroleum Council, says biodiesel is still in the early developmental stages. State lawmakers, he argues, shouldn't rush to subsidize a nascent industry. "Frankly, if this was anybody other than a bunch of heavily subsidized Illinois farmers, they'd be laughed at," he says. "Everybody suspends disbelief because they so want the family farm to be OK. If this was a bunch of chemical companies coming in and saying, 'We've got a chemical formula that will do this and this,' [regulators] would laugh out loud."

Market forces can have unexpected consequences. If, for example, demand for biodiesel explodes, and the price of soybeans skyrockets, the alternative fuel could become less desirable to consumers who already are reluctant to pay for the more expensive product.

But that's precisely where government subsidies come in. Proponents say such subsidies would help keep prices down. Additionally, they contend, any increases would be couched in the inevitable rise in the price of all fuels.

Such arguments have been getting politicians' attention. Both chambers of Congress approved legislation that would reduce the tax on blenders when the diesel is blended with up to 20 percent of biodiesel made from virgin vegetable oil. In mid-June, federal lawmakers were preparing a joint Senate-House conference committee to consider this proposal and a broader House energy measure backed by the White House.

Biodiesel proponents also have been successful in Minnesota. In March,





that state enacted the nation's first biodiesel mandate, requiring nearly all diesel fuel sold there to contain at least 2 percent biodiesel by 2005.

In Springfield, though, state legislation to subsidize the biodiesel industry has languished in the Illinois House Rules Committee. The measure, sponsored by Rep. Julie Curry, a Mt. Zion Democrat, would establish a tax exemption for the sale of biodiesel. The same exemption would apply to the sale of gasoline blended with 85 percent ethanol, the corn-based fuel additive used in automobiles. As part of a compro-

mise between corn and soybean groups, the proposal would reduce the current tax exemption on the sale of gasoline blended with a small percentage of ethanol. Proponents, including the Illinois Soybean Association, vow to push the measure during the legislature's fall veto session.

The proposed subsidies are designed to make biodiesel economically competitive, but consumers do have the option of buying it in Illinois. Beginning this year, Growmark Inc., a Bloomington-based agricultural cooperative, is marketing and distributing the

additive to farmers and retailers in this state, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin. Mike Lockart, Growmark's marketing manager for alternative fuels, estimates the coop has sold 300,000 gallons of biodiesel in Illinois — enough to put 2 percent in 15 million gallons of petroleum diesel — since March, when the campaign gained speed. "We would certainly have a very aggressive goal to triple or quadruple those figures [in 2003]," he says.

Indeed, more Illinois consumers are turning to biodiesel. According to Darwin Burkhart, mobile source programs manager at the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, such municipalities as Palatine and Downers Grove increasingly are fueling their vehicle fleets with biodiesel blends. "Many of them are doing it in combination with other fuels so we've had some that are using 85 percent ethanol in their sedans or pickup trucks and now they're saying, 'Hey, we've had good luck with ethanol, so let's try biodiesel,'" he says. "And if they've been using biodiesel, now they want to try ethanol."

Further, Illinois is home to two biodiesel manufacturers, with the potential for a third. Northfield-based Stepan Co. and Chicago-based Columbus Foods Co. manufacture biodiesel from soy oil. Archer Daniels Midland Co., the Decatur-based agricultural behemoth, is studying whether to manufacture biodiesel in the United States. The nation's largest soybean processor and ethanol manufacturer, ADM already is manufacturing biodiesel at two plants in Germany.

Vegetable oil may yet be a routine ingredient in diesel fuel, and Illinois is positioned to help satisfy any increase in demand.

"Biodiesel is not the answer to the energy crisis or greenhouse gas or all that," says Jeffrey Nelson, business development manager at Stepan. "But it's something we can implement today because we have all the infrastructure for growing, harvesting and processing soybeans. Biodiesel will be one of a thousand answers." □

# Plugging into nature

Sun, wind and grasses, not to mention animal wastes, could make Illinois a leader in the development of renewable energy

by Joseph Andrew Carrier

*Photograph by Warren Gretz/National Renewable Energy Laboratory*

Howard Learner is a busy man. This might seem surprising. After all, he heads a progressive environmental think tank in the tradition-bound corn-and-bean belt. Yet this spring he could be found in Washington, D.C., promoting energy conservation provisions in the new federal farm bill, and at a wind power conference in Portland, Ore., studying the possibilities in renewable energy. At this last stop, he managed to pause long enough to take a call from Illinois.

As director of the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center, Learner is an optimist, too. He might need to be. Through the static of a cell phone and across a continent, his voice communicates urgency. "Illinois," he said, "is on the cusp of jump-starting our renewable energy development and going from trailing the pack to leading the way."

That may be a too-enthusiastic analysis of Illinois' energy future. Still, there's no doubt about his assessment of what's taking place around the country. Iowa,

Minnesota, South Dakota and Wisconsin have working wind farms. Vermont leads the way in the

fewer gases and particulates into the atmosphere.

There appears to be public support

development of biomass energy, a process that turns plants into power. And many states, including oil-rich Texas, have mandated standards and deadlines for developing renewable energy systems, including those that utilize the wind, the sun and grasses. Those states' laws typically require utility companies to purchase a percentage of their energy from nonpolluting power sources within a certain time-frame.

However, Illinois has no such requirement. Indeed, until recently there has been little promotion of or research on alternative energy sources. And yet, for all of this state's sluggishness, Learner's optimism may be justified. Illinois certainly has potential. An abundance of renewable energy resources, including plants, wind and the sun, makes Illinois a prime candidate for the development of the alternative energy technologies that pump





for this. Recent surveys show that Illinoisans believe renewable, non-polluting energy to be a critical component of the state's future. And — they tell pollsters, anyway — they are willing to pay more for this “clean” source of energy.

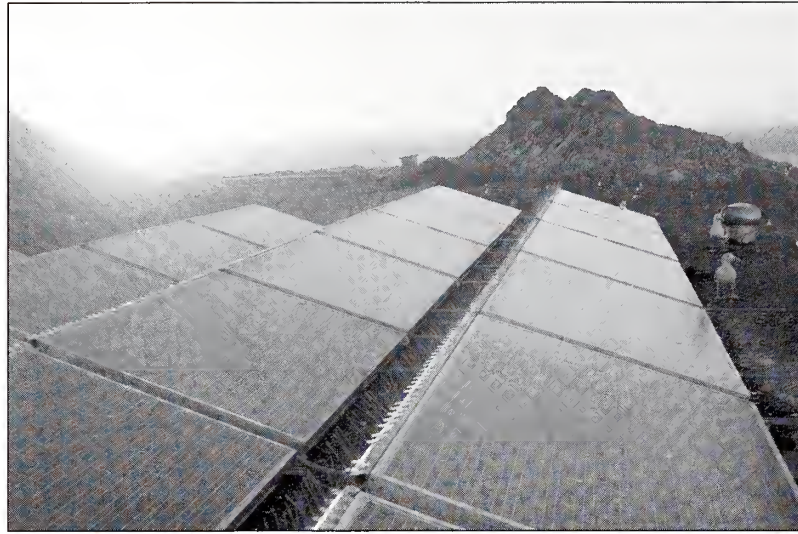
Further, state government is beginning to show a willingness to follow the more aggressive path of the city of Chicago in asking more from utilities and in providing public dollars to develop clean energy systems and to stimulate demand for them.

These factors — the state's innate natural abundance, a growing public awareness and increasing political support — would seem to confirm Learner's appraisal: “We are on the verge of something very big.”

**Illinois' greatest** opportunity for renewable energy development appears to be biomass technology, which generates electricity through the combustion of grass or wood. This system produces the same amount of carbon dioxide as the plants absorb through natural aerobic processes. As a result, the net output of greenhouse gases is negligible.

Thus, agricultural products and by-products, which are plentiful in Illinois, could provide a source of cleaner energy, while creating rural jobs and additional income for farmers. Transporting the plant material can be a challenge, though. To be cost-effective, biomass systems must use plant material that is grown nearby, which means a number of local biomass generators would have to be built.

In fact, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced in March that a federally funded project had been approved for a biomass “co-fired” plant in Havana. The pilot program will evaluate the feasibility of generating electricity using biomass from grasses that are used for watershed stabilization along the Illinois River under the federal ag



department's Conservation Reserve Program.

Chris Williams, alternative fuels manager for Dynegy Midwest Generation, which already operates a coal-powered plant at the site, says his company, a division of the corporation that owns Decatur-based Illinois Power, is committed to finding ways to incorporate Illinois agricultural products into its production format.

A hybrid system, co-fired biomass is considered a cleaner alternative to burning fossil fuels by themselves. Because carbon dioxide accounts for more than 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, a major culprit in global warming, such processes could become an important part of future energy solutions.

Biomass technology also represents an emerging and important market for farmers. Williams estimates that the system at full capacity will use 600,000 tons of plant material annually. Production and transportation of crops could create still more economic benefits for the surrounding region.

**Wind, of course,** can provide an inexhaustible potential source of clean energy. It produces no greenhouse emissions and has very little impact on the environment — not counting the technology's toll on birds slaughtered in the turbines.

For these reasons, wind is the fastest growing source of renewable energy worldwide; the scale of its

advance is staggering. The amount of energy produced from wind in the United States alone increased by 50 percent in the last year. General Electric just purchased one of the world's largest wind turbine manufacturers, and company officials predict an annual increase of 20 percent in the size of the market over each of the next 10 years.

Learner's associate at the Environmental Law and Policy Center, Hans Detweiler, says this increase in demand for wind generation systems has had the effect of reducing the overall costs of that process. In turn, that has spurred even wider interest, including in states like Illinois that once were seen as poor candidates for the technology.

Contrary to popular perception, Illinois is not a particularly windy state. To be effective, large turbines need sustained winds of about 15 miles per hour at a height of 50 meters. The relatively few areas in Illinois that meet that standard are primarily in the western region of the state. But Detweiler says developing just those areas could meet 5 percent of Illinois' total electricity requirement.

Though no one appears prepared to talk on the record yet, plans reportedly are under way to construct a wind farm in Lee County in northwest Illinois that is projected to be the largest of its kind east of the Mississippi River. Still, the hesitation to talk before the papers are signed signals the financial risks that still must be taken to develop this form of renewable energy.

One Illinois-based company has some experience in this. Michelle Montague of NEG Micon says lack of demand — and the political ups and downs of federal tax breaks — forced the company to cease production of wind turbines in Champaign, although the plant is still operating as a maintenance facility.

Nonetheless, proponents contend that wind power, like biomass energy, has the potential to stimulate

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***Officials say the state is searching for creative ways to demonstrate the feasibility of renewable energy in the private sector. But critics believe more could be done. Among the suggestions: Replace the state's renewable energy "goals" with mandates.***

struggling rural economies in the future by providing a long-term alternative income for landowners and a short-term economic stimulus through construction jobs.

***If Illinois is short on wind,*** it is blessed by the sun. And, as demand for the technology increases, solar energy is becoming more cost-effective to produce. While Illinois will never have the sun power potential of the desert southwest, photovoltaic systems do have their advantages. A key advantage is that they provide their most reliable output during the time of the year when Illinois utilities are struggling to meet demand: the hottest days of summer.

Some communities are turning to this source of energy. The city of Chicago recently unveiled the Chicago Center for Green Technology, which is purported to be one of the most energy efficient and environmentally friendly buildings in the world. Spire Solar Chicago, in partnership with BP Solar and Exelon, has developed an aggressive solar power strategy for that city's public buildings. Ten schools in the Chicago school system have been fitted with 10-kilowatt rooftop solar systems. Several other Chicago buildings have installed larger

systems, including the ComEd North Side Commercial Center, which has a 25-kilowatt system, and the Notebaert Nature Museum, which has a 30-kilowatt system. As will the pilot programs in biomass and wind power, these new photovoltaic processes will test the feasibility of large-scale systems for municipal and commercial applications.

In addition to biomass, wind and solar power, several other renewable energy sources are worth noting. Biogas, which consists of the methane harvested from livestock and municipal sanitation wastes, has the dual benefit of providing power and eliminating a major source of greenhouse gas emissions.

New Horizons Dairy in Elmwood is developing a 270-kilowatt methane conversion system through a \$380,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. Methane also is collected from landfill sites — and Illinois has 53 of those. An important development in the collection of landfill methane is a federal law that requires utilities to pay small energy producers fair market value for the energy they produce. Making small collection operations economically viable will allow low-kilowatt systems to grow throughout Illinois.

The state commerce and community development agency also is supporting efforts to refurbish hydroelectric generation sites at Marsailles and is upgrading a hydroelectric power source at Kankakee.

Illinois supporters of these and other renewable energy sources are planning to gather in Rockford July 11 for a conference on the subject.

All of these developments have been fueled by an apparent growing public interest in clean energy solutions. The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, which supports alternative energy sources, commissioned the poll to assess public attitudes toward renewable energy. The group's executive director, Jim Mann, says support is consistent throughout the state. The survey showed that almost 80 percent of Illinoisans want renewable sources

developed to meet the state's growing energy demands. And 67 percent of the respondents said they would be willing to pay an additional fee on each month's electric bill if a percentage of that electricity were generated from wind and solar power. An overwhelming majority, 77 percent, said they favored legislation requiring that at least 10 percent of the electricity supplied by Illinois utilities come from renewable sources.

Meanwhile, a state law aimed at helping Illinois' ailing coal industry find cleaner ways to burn that nonrenewable source also authorized \$500 million in bonds to develop renewable energy. It set goals: Five percent of the state's energy should come from renewable sources by 2010, and 15 percent by 2020. The commerce and community affairs department, which oversees the state's renewable energy grant process, is charged with finding ways to stimulate interest in clean energy projects.

Officials say the state is searching for creative ways to demonstrate the feasibility of renewable energy in the private sector. But critics believe more could be done. Among the suggestions: Replace the state's renewable energy "goals" with mandates. The state also could require utilities to allow customers to pay a little extra for clean energy. These measures have been successful in other Midwestern states.

Illinois, of course, is blessed by extensive coal beds. It boasts ancient, but still serviceable coal-fired utility plants — and the most nuclear generating reactors in the nation. Still, proponents argue that a more aggressive renewable energy development plan is critical to supplying Illinois' electricity needs well into the future.

And, ever the optimist, Howard Learner adds, "Clearly, renewable energy is something that the people of Illinois want." □

*This fall, Joseph Andrew Carrier will begin graduate studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield on the ways in which landscapes are reflected in literature.*



# THE IMPERIAL SCIENCE

STEPHEN FORBES  
*and the Rise of American Ecology*

Robert A. Croker, 2001  
Smithsonian Institution Press

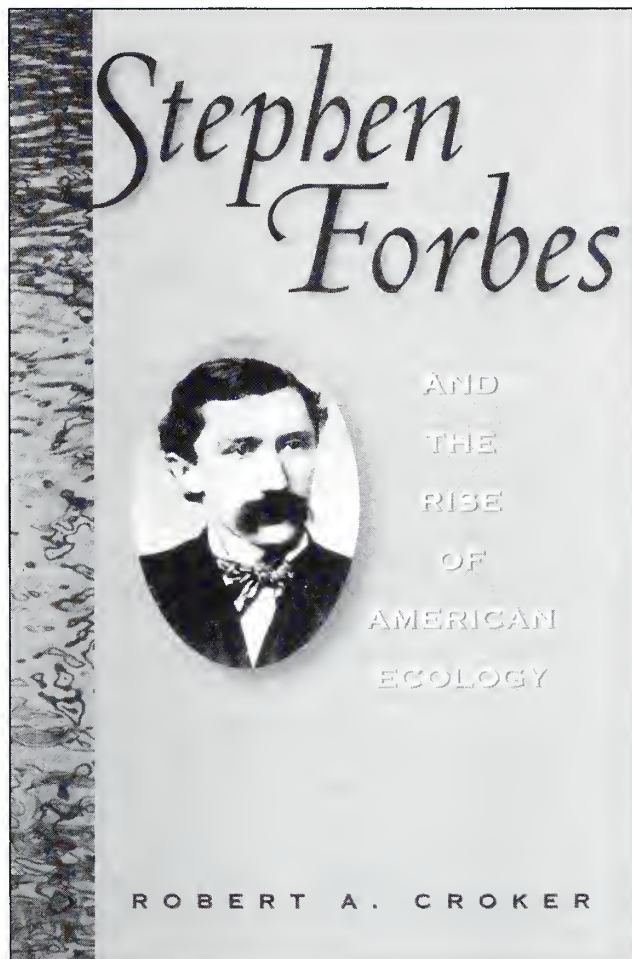
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Review essay by Robert Kuhn McGregor

Here's a new state slogan: "Illinois: Land of the Ecologists."

No, I don't suppose this is the kind of image that will roll trippingly off the tongue of the average tourist envisioning corn and soybean country. Still, state officials could certainly employ it if they choose. Of the 50 states, Illinois can lay perhaps the best claim as America's cradle of ecology, having provided critical inspiration to two pioneers of this science. The first was the great John Wesley Powell, explorer of the Grand Canyon and leading scientific bureaucrat of the 19th century. The second, less known generally, yet more fully acclaimed among modern historians of science, was Stephen Forbes, born in Stephenson County in 1844.

Of the two, Forbes would better speak the language of the Illinois economy and leave the more indelible



mark on the Prairie State.

The early careers of Powell and Forbes possess some marked parallels, which go some way toward explaining their atypical understandings of the natural world. Both men matured in Illinois farm country, each with an appreciation for the great outdoors. Each was self-educated in the sciences, grasping early the essential importance of Charles Darwin and the new geology not much considered in Illinois' tiny colleges. Each became a pioneer instructor in the natural sciences. Finally, each volunteered for service when the Civil War broke out, rising through the ranks to achieve officer status by war's end.

And perhaps it was their respective war experiences that created the greatest differences in perception in the two men: Powell was severely wounded and lost an arm; Forbes never suffered a

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***Becoming a scientist was a far simpler proposition in the 19th century than it is now. The very idea of science as a profession was novel; there were no approved courses of study, no university departments.***

scratch. In their subsequent scientific careers, Powell proved an ardent spokesman for scientific democracy; Forbes became an ecological imperialist.

Reading the first major biography of Forbes, *Stephen Forbes and the Rise of American Ecology*, by Robert A. Croker, the reader draws the conclusion that he came home from the war with no clear idea of his future. He spent a year attending medical school in Chicago, demonstrating a very military cast of mind, but took the idea of doctoring no further. Heading south, he took up school teaching near Carbondale, writing to his sister, "I am in the hands of God." More teaching positions and a principal's job followed, but Forbes remained dissatisfied.

The one thing that appealed was a hobby: He spent much of his spare time botanizing along stream banks and woods. Exploring shaded cliffs near Makanda, he encountered a fern he could not identify; none of the experts he wrote to could help him. In 1870, his description of *Saxafraga forbesii*, previously unknown to science, appeared in the *American Entomologist and Botanist*. Forbes was hooked on natural science.

Becoming a scientist was a far simpler proposition in the 19th century than it is now. The very idea of science as a profession was novel; there were no approved courses of study, no university departments. Charles Lyell and Darwin had opened the door to a new and challenging world, but America was slow to enter. For Stephen Forbes, self-tutoring in botany and entomology proved a training far in advance of most contemporaries, enough to gain him appointment to the newly founded science faculty at Illinois State Normal University in Normal. By 1873, he had become curator of the extensive Illinois Natural History Society collections at Normal, replacing none other than John Wesley Powell. Forbes rose from strength to strength thereafter, joining the faculty at Champaign in 1885, moving on to a deanship, an appointment as state entomologist, national and interna-

tional recognition, and more honorary presidencies of scientific societies than it's worth mentioning.

***To what purpose?*** If professional science was young as Forbes developed his career, ecological concepts were newborn. Rather than focusing on the particular and reducing each specimen to its essential elements, the ecological approach Forbes embraced demanded study of the interactions among a host of entities, determining the levels of cooperation, conflict and interdependency. Darwin's 1859 *On the Origin of Species* had pointed the way. Ernst Haeckel coined the word "ecology" in 1866. The concept was radically different, yet prey to the controversies that had haunted rational inquiry since the 16th century: Why do science at all? To Forbes, the answer was clear. We study the role of birds and insects in the environment to determine which are beneficial to human economies. Those we keep, the rest we eliminate. Forbes studied nature to control it for human purposes.

For a full 50 years, Stephen Forbes personally undertook studies of avian feeding habits, shooting specimens to dissect their stomachs. He conducted surveys in the Illinois River to determine fish and crustacean feeding patterns. He collected insects in fields and prairies to figure out which ones were eating the grass. To his credit, he discovered bacterial enemies that reduced populations of several agricultural pests, staving off a series of insect blights.

Still, while John Wesley Powell sat in Washington, D.C., trying to retain democracy in the face of Western land development, Stephen Forbes sat in Champaign insisting on the connection between scientific and imperial economic ecology. If there was no immediate economic benefit to be found in a study, he did not want to do it, and did not want anyone else to do it either. Forbes' voice was a powerful and oppressive force in shaping the official Illinois approach to the natural world.

He is nonetheless seen as a pivotal figure in the development of ecological science. Modern historians generally



identify *The Lake as a Microcosm*, a paper published by Forbes in 1887, as the first exercise in true scientific ecology, although he did not employ that word. Such credit is a bit disingenuous, as Charles Darwin and a host of others, including Henry Thoreau, wrote earlier works that were just as ecological in their interpretation and understanding. Certainly it cannot be argued that Forbes wrote with the completely neutral voice of the modern scientist; he intrudes himself into the manuscript at several points, and anthropomorphizes continuously, referring to “barbaric bream” and “worthless carp.” His methodology was astonishingly imprecise, and he based his conclusions on a single season of research, apparently autumn. The paper contains no statistics at all.

But it is an interesting paper. Obviously inspired by Darwin’s theory of natural selection, Forbes sought to establish the relationships among the various species sharing the resources of six glacial lakes. Five were in northern Illinois, one in Wisconsin. He labeled this relationship the “sensibility” of the organic complex, arguing that to understand any life form in the lakes, the researcher had to study the whole. This he tried to do, using dredges and trawl nets to locate species and make some effort to determine their habits.

Forbes was very much a prisoner of 19th century assumptions about life. He organized his discussion by classifying some animal species as “low and ancient life,” assuming that later-evolved life forms, such as mammals, were higher, meaning better. He saw evolution as a chain of progress, rather than a story of species adapting to the peculiar environmental circumstances of their time of origin. He categorized species according to this assumption, seeking to establish the existence of “a steady balance of organic nature.”

To do so, he pretty much ignored the plant communities, obviously too low, that were living in the lakes to concentrate on the movement of food from his lower to

his higher animals.

What emerged from Forbes’ study are some of the basic tenets of ecological evolution. The critters living in his selected lakes were there, he argued, because they shared a community of interest. Lots of different species may have tried to live there, but only the ones that had successfully adjusted to one another’s reproduction rates had survived. Natural selection had dictated the rates of multiplication and death that brought the community into balance. His lake was a system greater than the sum of its parts, a holistic entity that functioned on definable lines of mutual dependence.

Stephen Forbes delivered his paper before the Peoria Scientific Association, fine-tuning and publishing the work soon after. In a sense, it was a summary of the theoretical underpinnings that had defined his research since 1871. He had glimpsed the future of ecological studies: the holistic approach, the notion of feeding chains, the careful definition of isolated systems. There was much promise to be found in his insight; it seems a shame he did not pursue such a promising beginning. *The Lake as a Microcosm* was his only work to cause so much as a ripple among the not-so-well-balanced community of scientists, but that ripple was clearly felt. The “balance of nature” was a very attractive idea, especially if one could place it on a verifiable scientific footing.

This was a task Forbes left to others. While a panoply of scientific ecologists in America, England and Germany developed and refined — and eventually rejected in part — the concept of natural communities, Stephen Forbes went about the determined task of irretrievably altering them. He was undoubtedly correct in insisting that any valid definition of modern ecological communities had to include the influences of human actions, an idea too many theorists found repugnant.

The reason for their skepticism lay most probably in their suspicion of Forbes’ intent. Stephen Forbes saw knowledge as power, the ability

to transform ecological systems, eliminating the unwanted and enhancing the commercially valuable. If Forbes ever stopped to consider the possible consequences of such a path, his biographer does not mention the fact. Forbes saw himself as an economic entomologist first and always.

***Stephen Forbes retired*** in 1921, precisely 50 years after accepting his first college teaching position in the natural sciences. A half century is a very long time in the human equation, and Forbes was a very active man. His bibliography runs to more than 120 papers, and he commissioned and encouraged the research of countless others, always under his careful eye.

He employed his position as state entomologist to influence legislative funding for scientific research, defining the agenda and shaping the political relationship to the natural world. Certainly his influence is felt even today in a state where only a small percentage of the land is preserved as “natural” habitat, and the human domination of the landscape is taken to its logical extreme in field after monocrop field. We want just a few plants and a very few animals here — just like Forbes said.

Through and through, Stephen Forbes was a scientist, unemotional in approach, ruthless in application. He was of that peculiar variety environmental historian Donald Worster rightly calls the imperialist, fully prepared to use the knowledge and the weapons of science to achieve short-sighted human ends.

The Illinois farmer may have gained something, but Illinois ecology is poorer for his efforts, theoretical and otherwise. Reading the report of Forbes’ distinguished but narrow career, I could not help but long for the wider worldview, the true intellectual curiosity of John Wesley Powell. □

*Robert Kuhn McGregor, an environmental historian at the University of Illinois at Springfield, is a regular contributor to the magazine.*

## PEOPLE

### Suburban legislators take O'Hare airport expansion to court

Illinois Senate President **James "Pate" Philip** and U.S. Rep. **Henry Hyde** joined forces in a suit aimed at blocking the planned expansion of O'Hare International Airport.

The suit, filed by the two west suburban Republicans in DuPage County Circuit Court, names Gov. George Ryan and Mayor Richard Daley as defendants and charges that the expansion plan they brokered is unconstitutional. The plan, which would add runways and calls for a third airport in Peotone, would require removal of hundreds of homes in the districts represented by Hyde of Bensenville and Philip of Wood Dale.

The suit was filed as U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin pushes for federal legislation that would allow the \$6.6 billion expansion plan to move forward.

### New officials face higher ed budget hit

**Steven Lesnik**, the Chicago-area CEO appointed as the new chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, took charge at a rocky moment for Illinois' public colleges. Higher education had taken a \$105 million cut in appropriations for fiscal year 2003 by the time legislative action wrapped up.

Lesnik, a Winnetka resident, is CEO of KemperLesnik Organization, which handles public relations and management and development of golf courses. He's been on the higher ed board since August of 2000 and succeeds **Philip Rock** of Oak Park, a former Illinois Senate president who resigned from the board after serving as chairman for three years.

The announcement of Rock's resignation, and that of vice chair **Jane Williamson** of Kenilworth, came at the last board meeting of former Executive Director **Keith Sanders**, whose retirement took effect at the end of May.

### Deep throat?

On the 30th anniversary of the Watergate break-in that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, an investigative reporting class at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign made an educated guess that **Patrick Buchanan** is Deep Throat, the unnamed source that guided *Washington Post* reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward along the conspiracy trail.

Taught by **William Gaines**, a former *Chicago Tribune* investigative reporter

and winner of two Pulitzer prizes, the class, with succeeding groups of students, searched the documented trail for two years. They narrowed the field to seven "finalists." The majority of the students thought the evidence pointed to Buchanan, who was a speechwriter and special assistant to Nixon. "But," says Gaines on the journalism school's Web site, "the goal of the student investigators is to uncover facts rather than speculate, so the class will press on."

For information on their work, see [www.comml.uiuc.edu/spikeldeephthroat](http://www.comml.uiuc.edu/spikeldeephthroat).

## Quotable

“No one loved the state of Illinois more than Jim. No one knew the state better than Jim.”


*Former Gov. James Thompson at a memorial service last month for his longtime friend and advancement man Jim Skilbeck, as reported by Chicago Sun-Times columnist Mark Brown. Skilbeck, a showman with a genius for turning mere photo ops into major events, died in Springfield at the age of 53. Thompson delivered the eulogy at a Tinley Park hotel. At the end, Skilbeck suffered from a brain tumor, blindness, alcoholism and poverty. For a time, though, he made politics and government fun. And that's a pretty fair legacy.*

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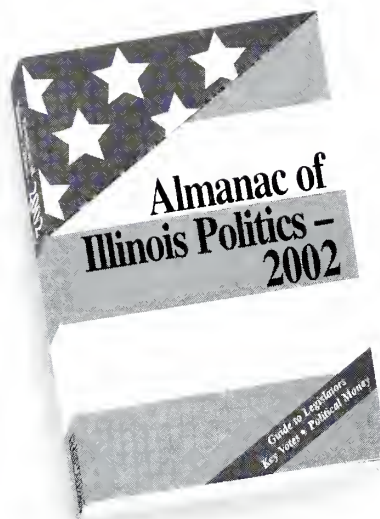
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## LETTERS

### Governor deserves credit for SeniorCare

I was dismayed that your May article on the SeniorCare program failed to give credit to the one person most responsible for it (see page 20).

Gov. George Ryan proposed the concept to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson and worked with U.S. House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert to make a comprehensive prescription drug benefit a reality for Illinois seniors. Health and Human Services is now touting SeniorCare as a model for other states.

Thanks to Gov. Ryan, up to 368,000 seniors with incomes up to 200 percent of the poverty level have access to virtually all prescription drugs beginning June 1, 2002. This will improve the lives of many seniors.

**Jackie Garner**

*Director*

*Illinois Department of Public Aid*

### Write us

Your comments are welcome.

Please keep them brief (250 words). We reserve the right to excerpt them.

Letters to the Editor  
*Illinois Issues*

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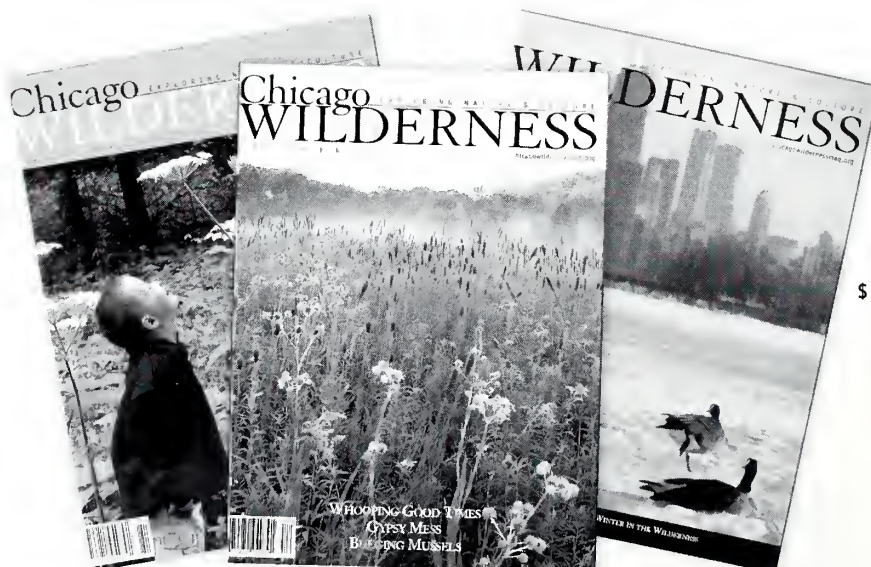
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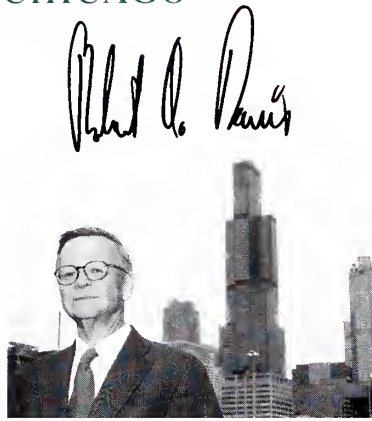
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## Chicago embarks on one of the biggest environmental challenges

by Robert Davis

When most people think of the environment, they think of trees. They think of birds and grass and flowers. They usually don't think of skyscrapers and median strips and convenience stores and floor area ratios. But they should. Because right now the city of Chicago is about to embark on one of the biggest environmental challenges of the last 50 years, and, in spite of announced intentions, it won't be pretty.

For the first time since it was adopted in 1957, back when the mayor's middle initial was J. and Chicagoans never dreamed they would someday go to the theater in the Ravenswood neighborhood, the city's zoning code is being rewritten.

Zoning is an issue that makes the normal person's eyes glaze over. It's one of those issues that politicians are elected to deal with, so the average guy doesn't have to. In fact, it's a safe bet that most property owners don't even know their own zoning classification. Zoning, in the world of government and politics, is just boring.

But that doesn't make it unimportant.

For simplicity's sake, zoning is this: It tells you what you can do with your property, and it tells you what you can't do. Because the city's zoning code was rewritten nearly half a century ago, it couldn't hope to deal with the development trends that have occurred since then. Nearly 850 requests for zoning changes came before the City

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*Not since the Chicago Fire created a blank canvas for developers in 1871 has such an opportunity arisen.*

Council Zoning Committee in the last year alone, according to Ald. William Banks, head of that panel. And, because the council devoutly believes in "aldermanic prerogative" on ward matters, it was up to one of the city's 50 aldermen to decide whether those changes would be made.

Court records and newspaper archives make it clear that, for many aldermen over the years, ward zoning matters have been a big revenue source, through campaign contributions from appreciative developers or outright bribes. When a multimillion dollar condo project is in the balance, even a few months' "delay" in aldermanic approval can cost the developer thousands of dollars. And, because the existing zoning code was so old, more and more changes had to be requested just to keep up with the times.

Now, though, the zoning rulebook is about to be changed. Mayor Richard M. Daley wants the City Council to hold hearings and adopt the new code by the end of the year. The traditional "blue ribbon commission," made up of aldermen, government officials

and private experts, has come up with a list of recommendations. Now the aldermen must get to work.

Among the proposals are new rules aimed at "preserving, protecting and strengthening neighborhoods," in the words of the commission. The members want to outlaw ugly strip malls in historic neighborhoods. They want to create a new zoning classification in such places as the Loop, where residential buildings can spring up alongside new businesses to encourage "high activity uses." They want to regulate massive parking garages and ban high rise condos in neighborhoods now dominated by quaint single family homes or picturesque three-flats. They want more back yards and front yards; they want Norman Rockwell-type porches; they want little flower gardens to bloom behind Mayor Daley's beloved wrought iron fences.

And they are not suggesting some mere architectural flourishes in a few trendy neighborhoods. They plan to remap the entire city of Chicago, all 227 square miles of it. Daley himself has said, "This is a quality of life issue."

And he's right.

A city is a living, breathing, growing thing, just like a forested park or an amber wave of grain. But, unlike many more traditional environmental issues, the stakes in the city's current zoning gamble are higher than most. A 40-story building is not a tree that can be knocked down just because somebody doesn't like it. An 800-space concrete parking ramp is not an unmowed lawn that can be spruced up in an afternoon.

Already, some aldermen are worrying that a new zoning code might cut into their traditional ward authority. But Daley says he's going to forge ahead, and set down new rules to engineer the face of the city for decades. Not since the Chicago Fire created a blank canvas for developers in 1871 has such an opportunity arisen.

The risks are great, but so are the opportunities. □

*Robert Davis covered urban politics and government for the Chicago Tribune for more than three decades. He now teaches journalism at Columbia College in Chicago.*

Charles N. Wheeler III



## Illinois legislators faced up to fiscal reality just in time for the new year

by Charles N. Wheeler III

**L**ike Alice returning from Wonderland, Illinois legislators faced up to fiscal reality just in time for the state's new budget year.

Their wake-up call came from Gov. George Ryan, who vetoed \$565 million from what lawmakers claimed was a sound financial document, then summoned them back to Springfield to produce "an honest and balanced" budget for FY 2003.

The governor's cuts included \$546 million in appropriations from general funds, the state's battered day-to-day checking account. For good measure, he pared \$12 million in outlays from an account earmarked for education and \$7 million in tobacco settlement outlays.

The action was needed, Ryan said in a message to lawmakers, because the spending plan sent to him initially was almost \$500 million out of balance, a gap too wide to be bridged by one-time revenues borrowed against future resources. As the final piece of the budget puzzle, lawmakers had authorized the governor to sell long-term bonds for quick cash, but, Ryan declared, "I will not balance this budget by borrowing from future revenues. Period."

If lawmakers balked at the cuts, he warned, they would be back later in the summer to vote for higher taxes to cover the shortfall. Faced with that ultimatum, the legislature overrode

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just \$55 million of the vetoes, including \$42 million in general funds.

The result met Ryan's approval; the final spending plan more closely matches expected revenues for the next 12 months. As long as projections hold, "then we should be OK," he said. But the tenuous balance comes at the cost of painful cuts in education, human services and the state prison system, and assures the layoffs of thousands of state workers.

Major targets for the governor's budget axe included:

- **K-12 education.** Ryan sliced \$101 million from school allocations, including \$32 million in general state aid and \$48 million earmarked for

such programs as special and bilingual education and student transportation. Lawmakers voted to restore the cut in general state aid and \$15 million of the program cuts, for a final allocation of almost \$6.2 billion in general funds for elementary and secondary education, some \$53 million less than last year's appropriation. But the bottom line includes \$112 million more for pension funding, meaning there'll be \$165 million less in state funds available for classrooms around the state.

Officials note the drop in state dollars should be offset by higher property tax receipts due to rising real estate values and by more than \$300 million in new federal funds. Still, about 20 percent of school districts will have fewer dollars, according to state education analysts.

- **Higher education.** Ryan chopped \$104 million in general funds, including \$38 million in scholarship money intended in part to cover fifth-year expenses for needy students. Legislators put back \$5.8 million in education assistance funds pared from individual university budgets, but failed to override the other cuts.

As a result, university officials warn, students are likely to face sizable tuition increases, less scholarship money, fewer course offerings and larger classes.

- **Human services.** The governor axed \$156 million, including money lawmakers provided in hopes of keeping open Lincoln Developmental Center and Zeller Mental Health Center in Peoria. Ryan's plans to close both may be thwarted, however, as employees and family members have gone to court to keep them open. He also cut \$60 million for prescription drugs and long-term care under Medicaid, as well as \$28 million for a 2 percent rate increase for community agencies serving the mentally ill and the developmentally disabled. Lawmakers restored only \$2 million in tobacco settlement funds for a senior citizen hot line on prescription drugs.





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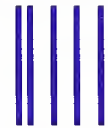
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- **Corrections.** The governor chopped \$106 million from the prison budget, including funding to keep Sheridan Correctional Center, the Valley View youth center, two work camps and a boot camp open and to forestall plans to bring in private companies to run prison food services. The cuts also will delay opening a new prison in Thomson and a new youth center in Rushville.

With the reductions, prison crowding will increase slightly, making the system more difficult to manage, officials said, but won't result in early release for any inmates. The budget does include money for upkeep and security at the mothballed institutions, in hopes they can be reopened in better economic times.

- **Other agencies.** Ryan pared \$78 million from other state agencies, and lawmakers restored only \$500,000 sliced from the secretary of state's operating budget. Among the more interesting casualties of the governor's veto pen: \$13.9 million earmarked for a

***Is the FY 2003 budget finally balanced? Probably not, in the traditional sense of ending the year with enough in the bank to pay to outstanding bills. By that measure, the FY 2002 deficit could be as high as \$1 billion.***

school safety program championed by Attorney General Jim Ryan and \$1 million allocated for the Main Street Program dear to Lt. Gov. Corinne Wood. The governor said nothing should be read into the vetoes, although both used him as a punching bag in the GOP gubernatorial primary won by the attorney general.

The governor also sliced a dozen or so of lawmakers' pet projects, but left hundreds of others intact. Trimming the projects could have freed up more than \$100 million for schools, health care and other core programs, but sparing them seems to have been the price for support of the tax increases counted on to help underpin the new spending plan.

Is the FY 2003 budget finally balanced? Probably not, in the traditional sense of ending the year with enough in the bank to pay the outstanding bills. By that measure, the FY 2002 deficit could be as high as \$1 billion. But the governor's vetoes guarantee that the new spending blueprint is much more realistic than the Alice in Wonderland version lawmakers initially sent him. □

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.*

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## PLUGGING INTO NATURE

Sun, wind and grasses could make Illinois a leader in the development of clean renewable energy. The Prairie State is blessed with extensive coal beds. It boasts ancient, but still serviceable coal-fired utility plants — and the most nuclear generating reactors in the nation. Still, proponents argue a more aggressive renewable energy development plan is critical to supplying Illinois' electricity needs well into the future. And to protecting the environment. This month, *Illinois Issues* examines that relationship between energy generation and the environment.